

# Afghanistan developments may be portents for new danger

by Susan Maitra and Ramtanu Maitra

The events that started on the Ides of April with the forced exit of Afghan President Dr. Mohammed Najibullah and the installation of a makeshift government based on an alliance between the depleted army and the Watan Party, have brought to the fore the futility of the manicured U.N. peace plan, through which Washington would like to usher in a non-fundamentalist, acceptable Afghan government. The events of April 15, though not unexpected, have developed a pattern of their own and if this pattern is disrupted by interested external forces, it could embroil Afghanistan in yet another cycle of bloodshed. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and emergence of new Central Asian republics and the expressed interests of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan, the feud among Mujahideen factions could easily spill over the defined and undefined boundaries of Afghanistan.

The U.N. peace plan, in its original form, had envisaged two sets of meetings which were scheduled to be held in either Geneva or Vienna. The first was slated to be an intra-Afghan dialogue among 150 representatives, to be hand-picked by Benan Sevan, the U.N. secretary general's special representative, from among the names submitted to him by all political groups in the country. These 150 representatives would, in turn, select 35 people who would decide through deliberations at the second meeting on the proposals to be placed before the *loya jirga*, or the Afghan grand council of tribal elders. The same 35 would also decide on the composition of the interim government to rule Afghanistan.

This "democratic process" ran into rough weather within four months when the Afghan rebel hardliners, such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Yunus Khalis, and Abdur Rab Rasool Sayyaf, rejected the plan outright. In retaliation, Hekmatyar presented a four-point plan of his own. The crux of this plan was the removal of Afghan President Dr. Najibullah. This would be followed in order, by the setting-up of an interim government, imposition of cease-fire, and holding of free elections. Hekmatyar, who is still backed by the Saudis and Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami, a member of the ruling coalition in Islamabad, started to campaign for his four-point plan.

But Hekmatyar met with little success diplomatically. Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who is under severe pressure from Washington on the nuclear as well as the Af-

ghan issue, threw his support behind the U.N. peace plan. Iran also followed suit, possibly because Hekmatyar, a Sunni Pakhtoon with Saudi links, had been openly insensitive to the Shia Mujahideen whom Iran shelters and officially backs. Moreover, Iran is aware of the changed circumstances vis-à-vis the formation of Tadjikistan and Uzbekistan. Iranian officials realize that if brought in to share power in Kabul, the Farsi-speaking Tadjiks and Uzbeks, along with the Shia Mujahideen, can play a role in bringing Afghanistan closer to Iran: Teheran saw in the U.N. peace plan some potential of achieving this objective.

Meanwhile, Washington, which backed Hekmatyar to the hilt with arms and cash in the period immediately following the withdrawal of the Soviet troops—and thus, widened the gulf between the various Mujahideen groups at that critical moment—had begun to project the Tadjik Mujahideen commander Ahmad Shah Massoud as a "moderate" leader, and, hence, acceptable. Massoud, who earned his stars as the "Lion of Panjshir Valley" because of his effective guerrilla warfare against Soviet troops between Kabul and the Salang Pass, visited Washington early this year and talked to officials.

## The sinking of the U.N. plan

The U.N. peace plan received a momentary boost when Afghan President Dr. Najibullah, whose six years of ham-handed rule had bred bitter enemies within the Army and intensified infighting within the ruling Watan Party (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan), announced on March 18 that he would resign by the end of April. His resignation was not unconditional, he pointed out to Benan Sevan. Najibullah said he would resign only if the interim government set up by the United Nations would have the appropriate authority and powers to guarantee the unity and safety of the Afghan people, as well as the country's territorial integrity.

In early April, Pakistan's press reported that the U.N. had succeeded in forming a 15-member transitional government council in Kabul and that the body would meet at Islamabad before the end of April. Although the official Foreign Ministry spokesman denied the entirety of this report, he admitted that "discussions are going on and the

list is yet to be prepared.”

With the die thus cast, Kabul was gripped by rumors on April 14 that Dr. Najibullah had fled. Press reports at the same time in India indicated that Najibullah was seeking asylum in India. It also became evident that Khalis and Hekmatyar's troops were on the threshold of Kabul, close to capturing the Baghram airport located about 50 kilometers to the north.

In the early morning of April 16, Najibullah made an unsuccessful attempt to flee the country. On the road, he was stopped by the once-loyal Jozjani security forces, whose chief Rashid Dostam had defected to join Massoud a few days before. Najibullah sought asylum in the U.N. compound where Benan Sevan was trying desperately to stop the situation from spinning out of control.

The post-Najib governing council, an alliance of Army brass and sections of the ruling Watan party that had compelled Najib to flee, had 5 of its 12 members drawn from non-Pushto-speaking ethnic minorities. It showed that although the Pushto-speaking Pakhtoons were not exactly sidelined, they were definitely undermined. It was also clear that the Jamaat-e-Islami leader Massoud, a Tadzhik, was lurking around the corner with his associate, Gen. Rashid Dostam, playing a key role inside the council.

The fallout of the coup—which was due more to the disintegration of the internally weakened Najib regime than to any serious powerplay, much less Mujahideen military victory—was predictable. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, afraid that Massoud would capture Kabul and the seat of power, reacted sharply, raising the Pakhtoon flag and calling for occupying Kabul by force. With the portents of an all-out civil war hanging thick, Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif—accompanied by his minister for religious affairs, the Jamaat-e-Islami chief who openly backs Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami, and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief—swung into action and began negotiations with the leaders of 10 Mujahideen groups based in Peshawar, Pakistan. The objective of Prime Minister Sharif was to build a consensus in the formation of a Mujahideen Council that would take over power in Kabul.

Meanwhile, in Kabul, Afghan Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil began marathon negotiations with Ahmed Shah Massoud to form a coalition of Mujahideen leaders, of the kind which took over control at Mazhar-e-Sharif in the north. While Prime Minister Sharif continued to face resistance from Hekmatyar, Wakil succeeded in forming an Islamic Jihad Council (IJC).

Although the formation of the IJC helped the much-maligned Watan Party and depleted Army in retreating from the sticky situation, it still left unresolved the central issue of non-Pakhtoon domination. Nonetheless, the Kabul government has begun to transfer power to the IJC in a number of major towns. As of this writing, Jalalabad, the eastern gateway to Kabul, and Kabul itself remain in the hands of the Kabul government, but

there are reports that negotiations are in progress to hand over power to the IJC of these towns as well.

### **The potentials and the pitfalls**

For all practical purposes, the U.N. peace plan which surfaced last October has been buried deep along with the British empire-seekers of 19th century and the mighty Red Army of the 1980s in the barren plains of Afghanistan. Washington may put up a brave front saying that the U.N. plan is still alive, but it will be hardly listened to anywhere.

On the other hand, it would be patently wrong to assume that an “Afghan-style” arrangement cannot be worked out, despite all the complexities. Observers of Afghanistan's history will point out that the Afghans have a unique way of forming a consensus, which often takes a long time. Often in an indirect way, the most difficult impasses are broken through. Such negotiations may result in giving full jurisdiction to local commanders over territories they control while the Kabul government, comprised of non-controversial leaders, will have a tentative grip over the country as a whole. The result would look something like Burma (Myanmar), where the Rangoon government has little control over the entire territory.

However, the present situation Afghanistan faces is distinctly different from anything in its past history. The United States, a military giant with its economy anchored on quicksand, is harboring ambitions to impose its new-found world order, which, among other things, prescribes democracy, as Washington likes to define it, and exercise of human rights as the basic requirements for a nation. Moscow, now manned by weak men with little self-identity, is in no position to disagree. At the same time, the emergence of the Central Asian republics has triggered a race between Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan as well.

The Iranians, who are upset over the blatant discrimination against the Shia Mujahideens by the Peshawar strongman, are watching developments carefully. A senior Iranian diplomat has been sitting in Peshawar since Najib's ignominious fall. There are also scattered reports that Iran has already sent some help, albeit insignificant, to the post-Najib government in Kabul.

Iran's objective is to see that Shia Mujahideens get a fair share of power along with the Farsi-speaking Tadzhiks and Uzbeks. In Mazhar-e-Sharif, for instance, the alliances between the Tadzhiks and Hazaras (Shia) has wrested power from the Pakhtoons. With their objective attained, it is evident that the more virulent anti-Shia leaders, such as Hekmatyar, will be kept on a leash. From a broader standpoint, the Iranians are keen to prevent the Saudis from gaining too much control over Afghanistan, and it is believed that by curbing Hekmatyar's power, Iran will gain this objective as well. The Saudis, on the other hand, are seeking to torpedo Iran's efforts.

Pakistan is in an extremely delicate situation. Burdened

with 5 million refugees, who have spent 13 years in the Northwest Frontier Province and northern part of Baluchistan, Islamabad would like them to go back home. At the same time, the Pakistanis are aware that if a satisfactory power-sharing formula is not found, the disgruntled Pakhtoons from Afghanistan, such as Hekmatyar, Khalis etc., may stir up the old movement for the formation of a "Greater Pakhtoonistan" which would involve most of Pakistan's western part. Perhaps it is this fear which prompted the Pakistani foreign office to tell newsmen on April 21 that any decision regarding Afghanistan's future will be based on a majority decision rather than on consensus. With Hekmatyar being the main obstacle to the formation of a Mujahideen Council, this statement indicates Pakistan is now ready to dump Hekmatyar.

### **Territorial integrity of Pakistan**

A similar warning note also came from the former ISI chief, Lt. Gen. Hamid Gul (ret.), a staunch backer (and personal friend) of Hekmatyar in his service days. In a recent interview, General Gul pointed out that the demarcation line between Pakistan and Afghanistan, known as the Durand line delineated by the British, is not recognized by the Pakhtoons on either side. "A minor misadventure" in dealing with the crisis in Afghanistan "could prove extremely harmful and lead to the disintegration of Pakistan," Gul said. Urging Pakistan to handle the situation with extreme caution, Gul insisted that any provocation which may lead to fighting between the Mujahideen and Pakistani forces will be considered by the Pakhtoons as "the Punjabi prime minister's prejudice against the Pakhtoons, and the struggle for the disintegration of Pakistan would begin." He also told newsmen that Hekmatyar had told him that any "alien force in Afghanistan would be treated as an enemy."

At the same time, Pakistan cannot ignore Iran's plans or Saudi designs, since both are Pakistan's friends. In addition, Islamabad will have to absorb pressures exerted from Washington. Caught in this cross-fire, and facing stray allegations, such as the charge that Pakistan is carving out the eastern part of Afghanistan as its sphere of influence, Pakistan will have to be extremely judicious, both diplomatically and politically.

Under the circumstances, Hekmatyar, with distinct links to Saudi Arabia, and Massoud, with links to Washington and Teheran, the situation could be dangerous. The danger is not only that Afghans will spill more Afghani blood, but once again the specter of "alien forces" walking into Afghanistan to rescue one or the other of their clients.

While the U.N. peace plan has little future other than rotting under the fierce summer heat, former Pakistani Chief of Armed Services Gen. Aslam Beg has correctly warned on more than one occasion lately that the Afghan developments are spiked with dangers, unless the external forces choose not to meddle in the affairs which best should be left to the Afghans to resolve.

## **Denmark approaches a change of government**

by Poul Rasmussen

The staggering series of economic and political crisis sweeping through all of Europe often takes a peculiar form in each country. While most of Scandinavia, particularly Finland, Sweden, and Norway, has been severely shaken by an unheralded crisis in the financial sector, the situation in Denmark remains relatively calm, at least for the moment. While Finnish, Swedish, and Norwegian banks have collapsed in a domino-like chain reaction, the Danish financial sector has remained untouched.

A significant factor behind the apparent Danish immunity from the Scandinavian financial crisis can be found in the geographical proximity of Denmark to the reunited Germany. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Denmark has been experiencing an unprecedented export bonanza to Germany, resulting in historic record surpluses for Danish balance of payments. Until 1989; Denmark had a 25-year, unbroken history of balance of payment deficits.

But the economic benefits of the reunification of Germany have not rendered Denmark immune to the political crisis now afflicting almost every country in Europe.

In September of this year, Prime Minister Poul Schlüter of the Conservative Party will celebrate his first full decade as the head of the Danish government. But 10 years in office is a long time by any European standard, and, in all likelihood, the Schlüter government will not survive long beyond September.

### **The IMF dictated change**

When Schlüter came to power in 1982, the world was staggered by the Mexican debt moratorium and the international debt crisis. All through the summer of 1982, the Social Democratic minority government of Anker Joergensen had struggled to compose a proposal for a new national budget. In May of that year, a delegation from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had visited Denmark and left a clear and uncompromising message to the Joergensen government: Your country has the highest national foreign debt per capita in the northern hemisphere and in the world. Therefore, you must immediately implement an unprecedented set of austerity measures.